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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Collaborative Action Team (CAT) process, which was initiated by the U.S. Department of Education, and which encourages the development of partnerships among families, community members, school personnel, and students in communities with histories of ongoing and underserved needs. CAT is based on a set of core principles and includes four stages of team development: Team Identification, Team Mobilization, Project Development, and Project Implementation. The core principles are representative membership, shared leadership, consensus decision-making, and action focus. The article focuses on whether collaborative partnerships among the school, home, and community can be developed and sustained as a result of the CAT process. CAT participants from Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas were included in the study. The findings show that over 90 percent of the sites under review had completed the majority of activities in the first stage of the CAT process. Teams were comprised of representatives from the home, school, and community, though family members other than a parent, teachers, higher education staff, and civic organizational personnel were less likely to be a member of the CAT. Overall, the results show that the development of school-based collaborative efforts is a time intensive, multifaceted endeavor. (Contains 16 references and a table that includes demographic information.) (RJM)

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School-Based Collaborative Teams: Evaluating Process and Student Outcomes

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Recognizing that "children's problems are increasingly horizontal, but government is organized vertically (Kirst, 1991, p. 617), those concerned with the well-being of children and families have sought ways to overcome the compartmentalization and fragmentation characterizing traditional delivery systems. Efforts to integrate and coordinate services for children and families across multiple agencies have been promulgated since the mid-1970's, however more often than not at the behest of local social service agencies (Kagan & Pritchard, 1996). It has only been in the past five to ten years that federal support has influenced and hastened the development of collaborative partnerships. The result has been a broad variety of approaches to collaborative work. Models, strategies, and pilot programs accompanied by an abundant literature of opinion, guidelines, theory, survey and case study research, and anecdotal experience have proliferated.

The role of public education in these collaborative efforts has also varied considerably and, in some circles, schools are deliberately avoided. For example, Heath and McLaughlin (1996) note that "partnership with community organizations seldom extends to education" (p. 70), because "many individuals working in youth organizations find schools the 'most difficult' partner among the many social agencies with which they have contact" (p. 85). Schools, on the other hand, have attributed the lack of collaboration with community organizations to the inflexible schedules and frequent turnover of agency staff, as well as to what schools perceive as competitive attitudes (Kagel & Routh, 1993). In addition to the difficulties encountered by schools in developing successful collaborative partnerships with community agencies, the relationship between schools and the families of students is also a source of conflict.

Although these barriers exist, it is believed that strengthening the involvement of families and communities in education is critical for enabling schools to function more effectively and respond to the complex needs of students and their families. As a result, connections between schools, families, and communities are more prevalent today than ever. Increasingly, schools have taken the lead in establishing collaborative links (Kritek, 1996; Payzant, 1992). Often these efforts are part of an overall plan for systemic school reform in an attempt to improve educational outcomes for children (Fox & Williams, 1991; Lourie, 1994). For example, increased academic achievement, motivation and interest in school, and behavioral and adaptive functioning are only just beginning to be assessed in relation to the impact of these collaborative partnerships (Eber & Rolf, 1998). Other outcomes receiving attention include reducing school violence and student substance use. It is recognized, however, that much of the current knowledge base on collaborative efforts between schools, families and communities, particularly as it relates to student success, is limited and largely non-empirical (Pryor & Church, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Collaborative Action Team (CAT) Process

As part of a federal Department of Education grant initiated in December 1995, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) designed the school-based Collaborative Action Team process to be implemented, tested, and refined over a five year period ending in December 2000. The research project, implemented across a five state southwestern region of the United States, guides the development of partnerships among families, community members, school personnel, and students in communities with histories of ongoing and underserved needs. After reviewing the literature on

collaboration with an emphasis on its links to educational settings, SEDL staff identified current collaborative practices, dimensions to successful team partnership development and maintenance, and barriers to effective collaboration upon which the CAT process was based. The process was developed to bring together local partners that represent the community's diverse points of view to increase the productive involvement of families and communities in the educational achievement and well-being of students.

The CAT process is based on a set of core principles and includes four stages of team development: Team Identification, Team Mobilization, Project Development, and Project Implementation. The core principles of the CAT process are: 1) representative membership, 2) shared leadership, 3) consensus decision-making, and 4) action focus. Based on these principles, the Collaborative Action Team moves through a series of team building and team planning activities created to generate momentum and support effective team partnerships proposed to be self-sustaining over time.

Stages of Team Development

The teams go through stages of development intended to lead to maturity and success in their overall goal to improve results for children and families. Team Identification includes determining who will be on the team and how members will work together to represent the whole community, including developing a vision and mission. Team Mobilization encompasses identifying and utilizing shared leadership, broadening communication and networking opportunities, and structuring the CAT meeting. Project Development is based on creating action plans and Project Implementation on carrying out those plans and maintaining the team's focus while accomplishing its goals. Each of these four stages of team development is comprised of specific team building and

team planning elements created to generate momentum and develop team strength in order to achieve an effective school, family and community partnership.

Elements of the CAT Process

Team building elements show team members how to work together as equal partners, respect individual diversity, and build trust to help the team solve problems and create new opportunities. Getting to know one another, talking constructively from differing vantage points, and undertaking projects together help build relationships among team members. The team building activities enable mutual respect and trust to grow as personal relationships and shared experiences evolve.

Team planning elements address tools and techniques for developing a vision, mission, goals and objectives, priorities, and action steps. Finding common ground, participating in dialogues about school community issues, and reaching consensus are all part of planning for collaborative action. Team planning helps to keep everyone focused and provides the structure for moving the team forward.

Generating momentum produces visible results quickly by taking easily accomplished steps toward change. Teams can generate momentum by working on manageable sized projects often resulting in early success. This success generates the energy and enthusiasm needed for long-term development and increasingly more complicated efforts.

CAT Process Implementation

At the inception of the Collaborative Action Team, members of the school community participate in an intensive Start-Up Training in which the team development activities comprising the CAT process are introduced. Team members also participate

in an annual Collaborative Action Team Training Institute at which knowledge and skills are shared and networking is encouraged. Team members are also provided a written resource, *A Guide to Building Collaborative Action Teams in Schools and Communities* (SEDL, unpublished), detailing the CAT process. In addition to the initial CAT training, SEDL field staff provide on-going consultation and technical assistance to each site with an emphasis on basic and advanced skill development to enhance the team's use of the collaborative process. SEDL staff visit each site at least quarterly and have frequent contact with team members (most often the SEDL trained CAT facilitators) via the telephone, postal mailings, electronic mail and videoconferences.

CAT members are encouraged to take on new roles and responsibilities, and as a means to this end, SEDL offers Facilitator Training and follow-up sessions to those who have been trained. These trained facilitators are provided a knowledge base and some basic tools to help others on their CAT become leaders and share the facilitation and team development responsibilities seen as necessary to effect change.

Quantitative and qualitative measures have been used to evaluate and continually refine the CAT process and capture a holistic picture of student success. Data collected in each site provides information on the implementation and sustainability of the process, student outcomes, and site demographics. The research provides CAT sites with descriptive and empirical data on their successes and areas of continued need while increasing the general knowledge base on the use of collaborative efforts within school settings and their impact on student success. This paper describes SEDL's research on the implementation and impact of the CAT process including the research design, results ,and implications.

Research Design

Purpose

The purpose of the research is twofold: 1) to determine if collaborative partnerships between the school, home and community can be developed and sustained in the demonstration sites as a result of the implementation of the Collaborative Action Team process and 2) to assess the impact of the process on student success. The research assists the CAT sites in identifying effective practices, training, and materials useful in goal attainment as well as those in need of refinement. Further, the study serves to build on the limited empirical knowledge base pertaining to the use of collaborative efforts within school settings and the impact of this partnering on student success.

Research Questions

The objective of the CAT process is to develop and sustain meaningful partnerships between diverse participants to improve results for children, youth, and families. To assess the achievement of this objective, the research answers the following questions:

1) Are collaborative partnerships between the school, home and community developed and sustained as a result of the implementation of the CAT process, i.e., as measured by team progress through elements of the four stages of the CAT process and use of shared leadership and facilitator skills taught in the CAT trainings?

2) Did the Collaborative Action Team process have an impact on student success, i.e., goal accomplishment, changes in student outcomes including standardized assessment scores; attendance, graduation and dropout rates; and discipline records?

Participants

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's emphasis is on ensuring educational equality for children and youth in the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New

Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas who live in poverty; who are Hispanic, African-American, or other minorities; or who have mental or physical exceptionalities. SEDL further identified five critical concentrations on which to focus its research and development projects: rural, urban, the Delta, the Border, and the Native American Indian Nations.

Recognizing the need for a representative sample of SEDL's region and the critical concentration areas, program staff in 1996 (Year 1) solicited applications from five sites, one in each state, to comprise Cohort 1. In 1998 (Year 3), ten sites in the region were selected for Cohort 2, and eight sites for Cohort 3 in 1999 (Year 4). Each CAT site is independent and serves one or more schools or an entire school district.

In Year 1, the CAT process was implemented in five sites serving 20 schools (see Table 1). All of the sites serve predominantly economically disadvantaged students with one site identified as rural; two urban, each with a majority Hispanic population; and one Delta with a majority African-American population. The fifth site is dually identified as a Border and rural site with a majority Hispanic population.

A second cohort of 10 sites in all five states, consisting of 42 schools serving predominantly economically disadvantaged students, was established in Year 3 (see Table 1). Five of the Cohort 2 sites are rural (one of which is dually identified as a Border site), three with a majority Hispanic population and another with a majority African-American population. Two of these five sites also serve at least a 10% population of Native American students. An additional four of the ten sites are urban, three with a predominantly Hispanic population and the other with a majority African-American population; and the tenth site is identified as Border with a majority Hispanic population.

In Year 4, SEDL established a third cohort of eight sites in four of the Southwest states in the region (no new site was established in New Mexico) serving 71 schools, serving predominantly economically disadvantaged students (see Table 1). Six of the eight Cohort 3 sites are rural, one of which is dually identified as a Delta site and another as Border. Two of the six sites serve a majority African-American or Hispanic population; another serves at least a 25% population of Native American students; and two other sites serve at least a 40% minority population including Hispanic, African-American, and/or Native American students. The remaining two of the eight sites are urban, both with a majority African-American population.

Each Collaborative Action Team consists of school, home and community representatives and students as appropriate. School representatives include: superintendents, assistant superintendents, and other district/central office staff and principals, assistant principals, teachers, teacher aides, librarians, support staff, maintenance personnel, and other school campus staff. Family members such as parents, grandparents, other caretakers, and siblings comprise the home representative group. The community may be represented by neighborhood associations, businesses, government offices, human service agencies, religious institutions, and volunteers. Students from secondary schools also serve on the CAT, however, student representation is open to all age groups.

Instruments

SEDL developed a *Collaborative Action Team Application Form* including questions about the demographics of the site. The application seeks information on the: 1) critical concentration area; 2) percentage of students in the school district according

to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, head of household; 3) location within an Enterprise Zone or Empowerment Community; and 4) existence of special programs and school improvement and/or previous partnership/collaborative efforts in the school/district. Further, the application asks for a response to how confident the site is that a Collaborative Action Team in their community would accomplish 8 team development activities and the extent to which 10 cultural climate factors exist within their community. The responses to these questions are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 designating none to 4 designating high. Additional questions on the form include information on the key issues identified in the site's school community; parent involvement activities at the site; social challenges and opportunities facing the community; and school administrative commitment and support. Most of these questions are open-ended, however, several require a response of yes or no.

As a means to assess the implementation and sustainability of the Collaborative Action Team process, SEDL staff developed a *CAT Self-Assessment*. The *CAT Self-Assessment* explores the team's progress throughout the four stages of the CAT process by examining the 24 elements to effective team building and team planning that constitute the stages. Team members respond to questions within each of the elements that correspond to the team's accomplishment of activities, or lack thereof. The *CAT Self-Assessment* is generally administered by SEDL staff but can be administered by local team facilitators. An instruction manual for the administration of the *CAT Self-Assessment*, developed by SEDL staff, is provided to local teams.

Another means to evaluate the implementation and sustainability of the Collaborative Action Team process is the *Collaborative Action Team Exit Survey*

developed by SEDL staff. The survey examines team members' individual perceptions of the factors that have helped to sustain the team and those that will impact the continuation of the team after SEDL involvement ends. The survey is comprised of 8 questions related to the previous, present and future sustainability of the CAT. Five questions have a "yes", "no", or "don't know response"; three of these questions, if answered "yes", seek further explanation. The responses to two questions are ranked on a 5-point Likert scale and one question requires a response of "increased", "decreased' or "fluctuated" change or stayed the "same".

In addition to the *CAT Self-Assessment* and the *Collaborative Action Team Exit Survey*, other assessment tools were developed to gather feedback from individual members regarding the implementation and sustainability of the process. These include a *Resource Guide Feedback Form* and a *CAT Meeting Checklist*. Further, SEDL staff observe Collaborative Action Team meetings and document the findings in extensive field notes as well as obtain information from team participants about the team's activities and changing characteristics in non-structured interviews. One mechanism used to obtain this feedback is structured sessions at both CAT Facilitator Trainings and yearly CAT Institutes.

Existing student outcome data from the school system within each CAT are used to assess the impact of the team process on student success. A variety of instruments have been utilized locally t o ascertain this data, such as the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* (ITBS; Hieronymus et al., 1996), the *Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (*CTBS5/Terra Nova Plus; CTB McGraw-Hill, 1996), and the *Texas Assessment of Academic Skills* (TAAS; Texas Education Agency, 1990).

Methodology and Analysis

The following steps have been taken to answer the first research question, "Are collaborative partnerships between the school, home and community developed and sustained as a result of the implementation of the CAT process?" During the team's first month of operation, SEDL program staff gathered descriptive data about the site from any of three sources: 1) the *Collaborative Action Team Application Form*, 2) brief, non-structured interviews with team members at the Start-Up Orientation Training, and 3) the *CAT Self-Assessment*. Data collection on the implementation of the CAT process began during the Start-Up Training in order to develop a baseline profile for each CAT site comprised of percentages on student, school, and geographic demographics, programmatic history, and identified key school community issues. Team members at each site completed a *CAT Self-Assessment* and provided anecdotal information on initial team development activities. Although it was intended that baseline *CAT Self-Assessment* data for all sites would be collected at the initial Start-Up of the CAT, this was unrealizable[1]. Consequently, Cohorts 1 and 2 *CAT Self-Assessment* baseline data were collected at the same time, but not at Start-Up and data for Cohort 3 were collected at Start-Up, but not at the same time as Cohorts 1 and 2, as seen in Graph 1.

The individual baseline profiles were compared across sites using mean and percentage difference, chi-square, t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures to provide a descriptive picture of site characteristics. A comparative analysis across

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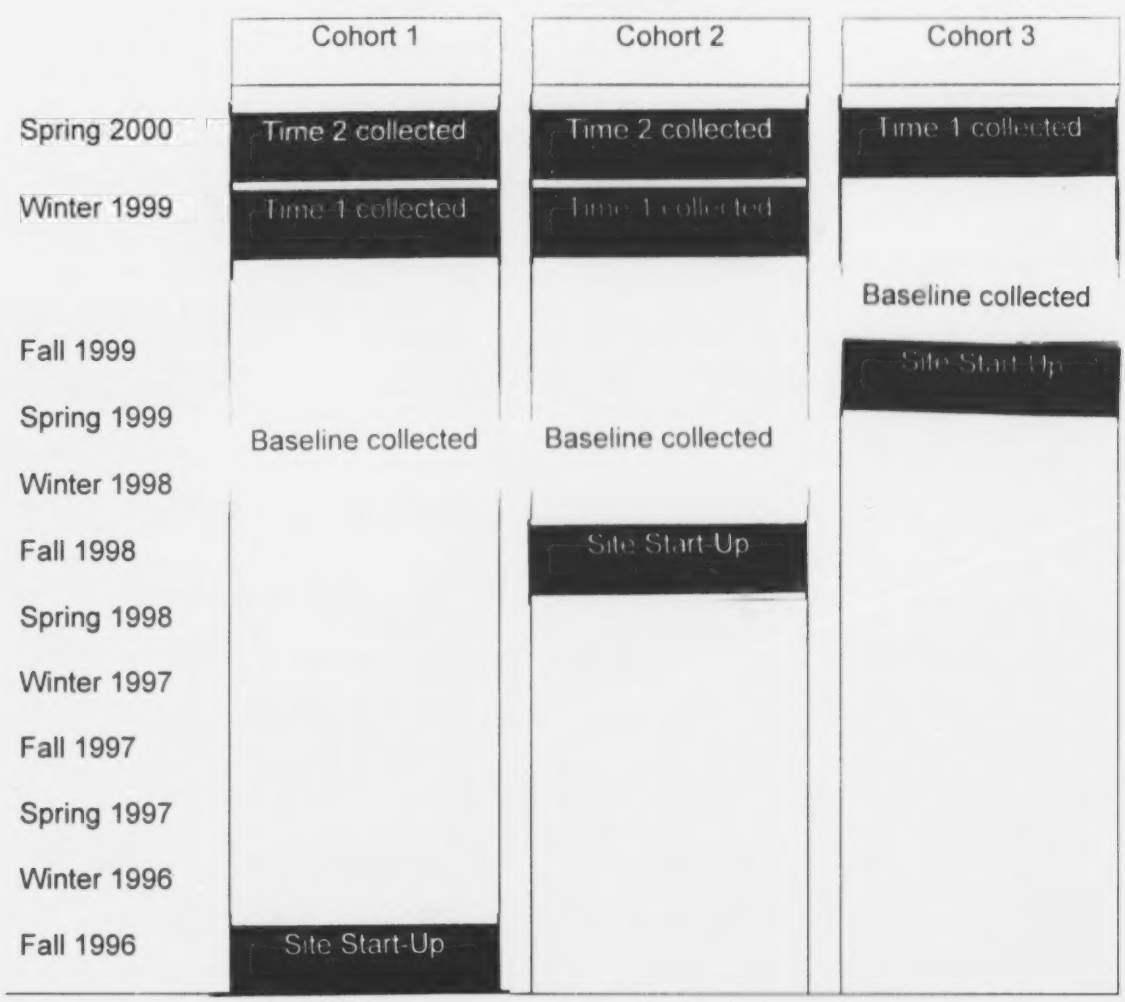
[1] Only some of the Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 sites completed *CAT Self-Assessments* at their Start-Up Training. Since the collection of these data were not systematic and the instrument varied from the current version, baseline data on the *CAT Self-Assessment* for Cohorts 1 and 2 sites were established in the Spring of 1999.

cohorts at baseline is limited by the collection time differences. Further analysis of the impact of this variable are beyond the scope of this study.

It was also recognized that although Cohorts 1 and 2 *CAT Self-Assessment* data were collected at the same time, the two cohorts had been in existence for differing amounts of time before their baselines were established. This difference in the length of team existence not only varies at baseline for Cohorts 1 and 2, but throughout the study across all three cohorts.

Graph 1: CAT site Start-Up and *CAT Self-Assessment* Data Collection



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Program staff administered the *CAT Self-Assessment* to Cohorts 1 and 2 in the Winter of 1999 and will again collect data from all Cohorts at the end of the 1999-2000 school year, as seen in Graph 1. There will be a total of three data points for Cohorts 1 and 2 and two data points for Cohort 3. A comparative analysis using descriptive statistics and repeated measures ANOVA within and across sites is completed at data points following baseline; however, it is recognized that across cohort comparisons will again be limited by the collection time differences for all cohorts at point 1, i.e, Cohorts 1 and 2 in Winter 1999 and Cohort 3 in Spring 2000.

The *Collaborative Action Team Exit Survey* will be administered to individual members at each CAT site toward the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year (September/October 2000). Percentage results and mean scores will be tabulated, explanatory responses to questions will be reviewed and categorized, and comparisons within and across sites will be performed.

The following steps have been taken in order to answer the second research question, "Did the Collaborative Action Team process have an impact on student success?" First, general student data available from the school system in each site were compiled for one year prior to the Collaborative Action Team's inception in an individual site and again each year of the team's existence until the completion of the CAT process project. The data were reviewed to provide a clearer understanding of the current measures being used to determine overall student success within and across CAT sites. A baseline of student outcomes was established and a descriptive comparison of like variables was completed at each data point. An analysis of positive

and negative trends across time will be performed. It is recognized that many variables across CAT sites differ in regard to definition, i.e, suspension/expulsion rates differ according to how a particular school or district defines these forms of disciplinary action; population, i.e., age, gender, grade levels; testing instrument; and time of collection which presents an additional limitation of this research.

Further, as part of the CAT process, each team develops its own objectives and action plan. Some objectives frequently developed by local collaborative action teams are focused on on-going team development while others are on student success. SEDL program staff has and will continue to interview team members, observe team meetings, maintain field notes, and obtain written documentation from sites on team accomplishments in relation to these objectives. The qualitative data were analyzed using a process of inductive analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process consists of the following steps:

1. The data for each question or observation is thoroughly read to ascertain their scope and to determine emerging themes and recurring regularities. Notes are taken about the data, hunches, and ideas during this first reading.
2. The data is reread and segmented into categories/themes reflecting the themes determined in Step 1.
3. As each set of data by category is read, refinements in categories (including renaming categories, re-segmenting content, subdividing broader categories, and discarding irrelevant categories or adding new ones) is completed.
4. The data is examined, summarized, and compared for each CAT site and across sites.

Results

A preliminary analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of the collaborative partnering on team development, sustainability and student success was completed in relation to the core principles of the CAT process: representative membership, shared leadership, consensus decision-making, and action focus.

Overall for Cohorts 1 and 2, the majority of teams have made progress in the implementation of the CAT process. Over 90% of the sites have completed the majority of activities in the first stage of the CAT process (Team Identification) by baseline. Fewer sites have completed the majority of activities in the second stage (Team Mobilization); however, the length of time the team has existed seems to be a factor in progress made in this stage. Some progress has been made by several of the teams in both Cohorts 1 and 2 in the third stage (Project Mobilization) and little to no progress has been made in the fourth stage (Project Implementation). Cohort 3 sites had little, if any, experience with collaboration prior to the establishment of their Collaborative Action Team and no analysis on their progress has been performed to-date.

More specifically, at baseline in 93% of the sites in all three Cohorts, the teams were comprised of representatives from the home, school and community (and students, if the sites included a secondary school). Several types of representatives were, however, less likely to be a member of the CAT. These were family members other than a parent, teachers, higher education staff, and civic organization personnel. Although not statistically significant, changes did occur over time in Cohorts 1 and 2 sites in regard to representative membership on the Collaborative Action Team. School involvement decreased over time while parent involvement increased.

Meeting organization, including maintaining meeting minutes, establishing a meeting agenda, having a current membership list, and sending meeting notices, was not accomplished in slightly more than 60% of the Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 teams at baseline. Over time, these teams did show improvement in these areas and by Time 1, more than 80% of these teams were accomplishing at least three of the four meeting organization activities. In addition to meeting organization, other activities toward mobilizing their teams included the development of a vision and mission and shared leadership. The majority of teams in Cohorts 1 and 2 were found to have completed the establishment of a vision and mission for their CAT, but were only marginally implementing shared leadership.

Ten factors were found in relation to encouraging and sustaining shared leadership and decision-making as well as influencing the development of effective collaborations between the home, school, community, and students. These factors are:

- A sense that everyone is in this together
- Listening with empathy to one another
- Decision-making spread across the team
- Recognition of mutual benefits
- Creativity (encouraging new ways of thinking and acting)
- Broad-based commitment to the mission
- Sustained energy and prevention of burn-out of its members
- Development of new leaders for the school and whole community
- Relationship building across the school and community
- Creation of trust, often where none existed previously.

The results indicate team members do utilize training provided by SEDL to enhance shared leadership, but none have used mentoring or coaching to further develop shared leadership and only 18% encourage new roles and responsibilities among members. Additionally, the majority of teams have begun to develop resources and networks within the CAT, but few have developed resources or networking outside of the CAT.

Related to the fourth principle, action focus, less than 30% of the Cohorts 1 and 2 teams developed an action plan, at baseline, in which activities, tasks, and timelines were identified. Although not statistically significant, changes over time were found and 25% of these teams had begun to develop an action plan by Time 1. Neither Cohort 1 nor Cohort 2 teams have utilized any type of formal evaluation in their activities. Further, few of the teams have used technology in their endeavors to make change in their school community and, at that, it has been very limited.

In regard to student outcomes, it has been found that most schools rely heavily on standardized achievement scores and attendance, dropout, and graduation rates to determine a student's success. Although many schools have more recently made attempts to collect discipline data, e.g., suspensions, expulsions, disciplinary action, as another means to measure student success, little data was available to analyze on this measure from the existing CAT sites. In 100% of all of the CAT sites, student achievement scores on standardized tests were below district and state averages at baseline. Although not statistically significant, some improvement in scores was found at Time 1 for Cohorts 1 and 2 sites. Improvement was also found in dropout rates from

baseline to Time 1 for 22% of the Cohorts 1 and 2 sites. Attendance rates were generally good at baseline, and little change was found over time.

Implications

The results indicate that the development of school-based collaborative efforts with the home and community is a time intensive, multi-faceted endeavor. Establishing and maintaining representative membership from the home, school, community, and students is an activity the team focuses on not only at the beginning of their development but throughout the collaborative process. Limited teacher involvement in collaborative team meetings seems to reflect schedule and time commitment issues, including administrative constraints to spend all of their time in the classroom. However, teachers are not well represented even at meetings held in the evenings or times not during school hours. Although teachers generally want to provide their students with the best possible education, they have received little, if any, training in their teacher education programs about working with families and communities. Further, many school administrators, from the campus to the district level, do not role model collaborative behavior and even show opposition to any collaborative attempts to involve "outsiders". Additionally, it also seems apparent that the past emphasis by schools on parent involvement, to the exclusion of other family members, is also reflected in the Collaborative Action Teams. This flies in the face of current family structure in which many school-aged children are being cared for by extended family members and others who have enormous knowledge of the child and much to offer toward collaboration.

Teams that progress more rapidly use organizational skills, particularly those that establish on-going communication among members, i.e., minutes, agendas, notices, and such. Further, establishing a shared vision and team mission also seems to motivate team cohesion and momentum. Without clear roles and responsibilities for team members and shared leadership these activities do not seem to get accomplished. Although most team members seem to have a surface understanding of the concept of shared leadership, many find it difficult to implement. This is not a surprise since much of the literature and general practice acknowledges the need for team leadership but emphasizes one, strong leader to guide the process. The results also indicated that early structured education on shared leadership and consensus decision-making seems to provide not only a basis of knowledge for team members but also provides some support that individuals seem to need to incorporate these concepts into practice.

The ten factors that encourage and sustain the development of effective collaborations between the home, school, community, and students also seem to play an important role in the success or lack of progress Collaborative Action Teams experience. Many of these factors are supported in the general literature on team process. What seems to be key is how and when relationship building develops among the variety of stakeholders in the school community. Specifically, trust must be attained before success can be realized.

The results also indicate that when teams focus on actions, rather than on just planning, more progress is made in their collaborative efforts. Further, developing a written action plan, with tasks and timelines spelled out, seems to be the most helpful in team progress toward making improvements for students and their families. Although

focusing on poor student outcomes is touted by individual team members as the major need, many teams have not yet directly tackled issues such as standardized test scores, dropout rates or discipline problems. Bringing the home and community, as well as students themselves, into the decision-making process regarding student outcomes, traditionally school-only issues, continues to be a barrier. However, some change has occurred in the pedagogy as well as practice regarding collaboration and its potential impact on student success.

Research Limitations

There are various limitations in this study that must be considered. Most notably, this is applied research and there is limited control over circumstances in the environment in which the CAT process is implemented. Since the team is school-based, changes in the school and district may have had an impact on team progress and sustainability. For example, in a few of the sites the district administrator who provided the necessary support for the implementation of the CAT process were replaced. This change impacted the district's commitment to provide CAT meeting space, representation at CAT meetings, and participation in CAT activities or events. Conversely, broader support by a new administrator in several other sites may have been the factor in these team's increased activity and progress. Changes in campus administrators or school staff who have been assigned to coordinate the CAT also seem to have a similar effect.

Schools may initiate other school reform projects during the implementation of the CAT process that can also impact results. For example, a school or district implemented the comprehensive school reform model Cooperative Integrated Reading

and Composition (CIRC) in addition to the Collaborative Action Team process. Student outcomes such as standardized reading scores and attendance rates steadily increased at the site. It would be difficult to isolate which practices: CAT, CIRC, both, or neither, were key in the improvements realized.

The results of the research also may reflect other changes in the community in which the CAT has been implemented. For instance, a team in a small, rural community found they could not maintain a representative community and/or home membership on their CAT because several large factories closed and obtaining jobs or relocating became the principle focus for the people of this town. The Collaborative Action Team meetings were sporadic and not well attended and the team's progress was limited.

Other factors that may have had an impact on the research are changes in the SEDL staff providing technical assistance to the CAT sites and the on-going development of the process throughout its implementation. These factors influenced the training SEDL provides to the CAT sites and in turn may have made a difference in the amount and type of progress made by each team. In addition, these factors are also reflected in the variability in the time of inception of each site. As new sites are implemented, lessons learned in the field from earlier site development may have had a greater impact on the results than can be assessed in this study. Further, the data collected over time was not at the same time intervals for all sites and may have been a factor in the results obtained.

Finally, assessing other existing data for student outcomes in which varying definitions, instruments, and data collection procedures were used can also present issues for validity and generalizability of results.

Significance of the Research

This study fills a gap in the literature and practice that has existed for many years. There is limited empirical knowledge on collaborative efforts between schools, families and communities, particularly as it relates to student success. Even less is known longitudinally about changes in the implementation of collaborative processes. The intended outcome of this research will be a finely tuned school-based, collaborative process that can be implemented across a variety of settings to develop and sustain partnerships to improve student success. The process will include specific activities the school, family, and community can engage in to be equal partners in decision-making and policy change within the educational system and community-at-large. More broadly, this collaborative process may be applicable in a variety of fields in which collaboration is seen as one solution to the multi-faceted problems facing our society today.

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Table 1

Collaborative Action Team Site Demographics

CAT site	Established	Region	Schools served by CAT	% free/reduced	Student ethnicity
Cohort 1					
West Memphis, AR	08/14/96	Delta	1 elementary school	100%	99% African-American; 1% other
St. Bernard Parish, LA	10/19/96	Rural	1 middle school	88%	63% White; 33% African-American; 4% other
Rio Grande Cluster, NM	09/05/96	Urban	1 high; 4 middle and 7 elementary schools	76%	83% Hispanic; 11% White; 6% other
Oklahoma City, OK	10/04/96	Urban	1 middle school	100%	65% Hispanic; 18% White; 10% African-American; 7% Native American
Fabens, TX	09/11/96	Border/ Rural	1 high; 1 junior high; 1 elementary and 1 primary school; and 1 early childhood center	95%	97% Hispanic; 3% other
Cohort 2					
Pine Bluff, AR	09/16/98	Rural	1 high; 1 junior high and 3 elementary schools	66%	80% African-American; 20% White
New Orleans, LA	08/17/98	Urban	1 elementary school	100%	100% African-American
Albuquerque Cluster, NM	10/29/98	Urban	1 high; 2 middle and 10 elementary schools	69%	66% Hispanic; 22% White; 12% other

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Table 1 (continued)

CAT site	Established	Region	Schools served by CAT	% free/reduced	Student ethnicity
Highland Cluster, NM	10/29/98	Urban	1 high; 2 middle and 8 elementary schools	62%	40% Hispanic; 36% White; 10% Native American; 14% other
Los Lunas, NM	10/21/98	Rural	1 elementary school	100%	63% Hispanic; 31% White; 6% other
Mora, NM	11/14/98	Rural	1 high; 1 middle and 2 elementary schools	89%	78% Hispanic; 21% White; 1% other
Ponca City, OK	09/12/98	Rural	1 mid-high school	44%	82% White; 12% Native American; 6% other
Balmorhea, TX	06/30/98	Rural/ Border	1 school all grades (K - 12)	71%	80% Hispanic; 19% White; 1% other
Del Valle, TX	10/03/98	Urban	1 high school	48%	53% Hispanic; 32% White; 14% African-American; 1% other
Rio Hondo, TX	10/24/98	Border	1 high; 1 middle and 2 elementary schools	81%	94% Hispanic; 6% White

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Table 1 (continued)

CAT site	Established	Region	Schools served by CAT	% free/reduced	Student ethnicity
Cohort 3					
Little Rock, AR	09/23/99	Urban	5 high; 8 junior high and 35 elementary schools	50%	68% African-American; 28% White; 4% other
Marianna, AR	09/01/99	Rural/ Delta	1 high; 1 middle and 2 elementary schools	89%	91% African-American; 8% White; 1% other
Marshall, AR	08/17/99	Rural	1 junior/senior high and 1 elementary school	60%	98% White; 2% other
East Baton Rouge, LA	08/18/99	Urban	1 elementary school	98%	99% African-American; 1% White
Clayton, OK	08/30/99	Rural	1 high and 1 elementary school	73%	75% White; 25% Native American
Clinton, OK	09/09/99	Rural	1 high; 1 middle and 3 elementary schools	73%	55% White; 23% Hispanic; 11% Native American; 10% African-American; 1% other
Pharr, TX	10/14/99	Rural/ Border	2 elementary schools	88%	2% White; 98% Hispanic
Terrell, TX	08/26/99	Rural	1 high; 1 middle and 4 elementary schools; and 1 pre-K to K center	51%	49% White; 34% African-American; 16% Hispanic; 1% other